The Influence of Peer Culture on Mexican-Origin Bilingual Children's Interpretations of a Literacy Event

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Abstract

Studies in writing research have investigated how students' understanding of the purpose and goals of literacy events may differ from the teacher's. In the present study, a dialogue journal literacy event was examined as a case site for the investigation of children's interpretations of a literacy event. Bilingual (Spanish-English) first and second graders' oral and written language interactions were examined in order to identify the various ways that they interpreted the dialogue journal literacy event. The students' interpretations are discussed in terms of event-types which describe the students' social purposes and how their interactions with oral and written language during the literacy event mediated peer relationships. The factors which influenced their interpretations included the teacher's requirements for the literacy event and the students' participation in peer culture. The students interpreted the literacy event in a manner which allowed them to pursue their own interests as children and at the same time meet the teacher's requirements for the event.

Introduction

Children's interpretations of literacy events may differ significantly from adults' interpretations as indicated by studies which investigated how students' understanding of the purpose and goals of literacy events differ from the teacher's (Dyson, 1985; Hudson, 1988; Nelson, 1990). These studies examined students' interpretations of writing assignments with the goal of better understanding how students made sense of literacy events. One factor identified in children's interpretation of literacy events is the influence of peer culture on the manner in which literacy is defined, owned, and controlled by children. The peer group's use of literacy helps establish the specific definitions and functions which literacy serves the group (Bloome, 1983; Dyson, 1985, 1989). Examining the influence of the peer group on children's uses of literacy contributes to, "an understanding of children's interpretations of what oral and written language does and what it means in their social world" (Gilmore, 1986, p. 155).

In a study of children's writing in a multi-ethnic classroom, Dyson (1989) identified relationships between the peer culture of young children and literacy. As a peer group, children were audiences and critics of one another's written stories during journal writing time. Dyson found that written language was part of the knowledge and skill valued by children and that it was a social tool which helped them connect with their peers. Children positioned themselves in relation to others through their participation in literacy events and through their written texts. Social relationships and on-going friendships were established or reaffirmed through children's interactions during the literacy event and through the stories they wrote. Dyson suggested that a perspective which emphasized students' social purposes during literacy events might provide more insight into young children's literacy than one which only examined the forms of children's written texts. A focus on writers' purposes in research on literacy would contribute to a better understanding of what literacy means to the students and what functions it served them. Nystrand (1989) made similar observations to Dyson in relation to student's writing and their social purposes. He stated that written texts were not only the result of writing but were also a medium of communication and as such the features of writing were best understood in relation to the writer's and reader's interests and purposes. The forms of writing were not only related to the functions which particular texts serve but also to the role and influence of the social relationships which those texts help establish and mediate.

Peer culture is characterized by Corsaro (1988) as children's persistent attempts to gain control over their lives through the production and sharing of social activities with other children and is defined by him as "a stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers" (Corsaro & Eder, 1990, p. 197). Among the values and concerns of young children's peer culture in general are the importance of sharing and social participation which is illustrated by children's attempts to negotiate friendships (Corsaro, 1985). Routines play a key role in children's creation and interpretation of their activities because they are recurrent and predictable frames within which "a wide range of sociocultural knowledge can be produced, displayed, and interpreted" (Corsaro, 1992, p. 163). Examples of routines from peer culture include: role playing, chanting and rhyming routines, and children's games such as

approach and avoidance routines in which children typically run away from a monster or wild animal. Routines are part of children's language based activities by which they construct the social worlds of their interactions (Cook-Gumperz & Corsaro, 1986) and children communally produce and share a sense of membership in their peer culture through their participation in routines. To date, however, there has been a lack of studies on the peer culture of young Mexican-origin children. An exception is McDowell's (1982) study of the verbal art of East Austin peer groups which documented chants, rhymes, and other forms of Mexican-origin children's folklore.

Examinations of children's interpretations of literacy and other types of instructional events help adults understand the meaning an event holds for the students, and the role social interaction between participants plays in their interpretations of events. Research on students' patterns of interaction during instructional events has examined relationships between minority students' cultural background and academic performance (Au, 1980; Michaels, 1986; Moll, 1988). However, still lacking are studies which examine influences from the peer culture of young Mexican-origin children on their interactions during instructional events. Given the high number of Mexican-origin students in schools and the concern with understanding relationships between students' culture and their interactions during instructional events (Chapa, 1991), these studies are needed in order to develop a knowledge base of their peer culture and to identify how peer-culture serves as a cultural and linguistic resource that impacts students' interactions in instructional events. In the literacy event examined in this study, features of Mexican-origin children's peer culture including communicative routines of argumentation and name calling along with values and concerns such as the negotiation of friendships reflected how peer culture influenced their interpretations of the literacy event. Examples such as these highlight for educators the key role peer culture can play in young children's interpretations of some literacy events. In the area of bilingual education, this knowledge is important since it identifies links between children's interpretations and their related social purposes in a given literacy event with specific uses of Spanish and English in their oral and written interactions. Young children's strategic uses of their bilingualism and biliteracy are thus contextually linked with specific literacy events through the identification of their interpretations of those events.

The present study was concerned with young bilingual, Mexican-origin children's interpretations of a dialogue journal literacy event. The focus of the study was not on the classroom use of dialogue journals.[1] Instead, the dialogue journal literacy event was examined as a case site for the investigation of these children's interpretations of a specific literacy event. In their interactions during the event, the bilingual children in this study used oral and written language to pursue the interests and concerns of the social world of childhood. The dialogue journal literacy event is described in the following section. A summary follows of the event-types which categorize the various ways in which children interpreted the event. Two examples illustrate the event-types as well as how the children's interests and concerns from peer-culture were pursued through their oral and written language interactions during the event.

Data Source

Observations of the dialogue journal literacy event were conducted in a bilingual first grade classroom during the last three months of the year and the entire nine months of the following second-grade year. The school was in an urban setting in the southwest United States. Students' interactions during the event were documented through audio recordings and observational notes. Focal children were selected for data analysis who were bilingual and had not been absent for prolonged periods of time during the 15 months of data collection. Two male and two female students were selected as focal students. The students were Mexican-origin from working-class families and ranged in age from six to eight years-old during data collection. They were first generation American born and had been in a bilingual kindergarten. They were fluent in both languages and used both languages in the speaking and writing that took part during the journal literacy event.

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[1] Two studies which have examined the use of dialogue journals with bilingual children are Flores and Garcia (1984). and Reyes (1991). Their focus was on the use of dialogue journals in the classroom and not on the students' interpretations of the event. Other research on dialogue journals has also examined their use in classrooms (for example Braig, 1986; Staton, 1988). In all these studies the students exchanged their journals with the teacher and not with each other. Consequently, the influence of peer-culture in children's interpretations of dialogue journals was not an issue in this previous research.

Procedure

The teacher's requirements for the dialogue journal literacy event were writing a personal narrative and participation in a written dialogue. Students were asked to write a story about something that they had done (such as a playing with friends or visiting relatives) and to read it to a classmate. The classmate in turn wrote a response to the narrative on the journal that initiated a written dialogue between the two students. The students then repeated the process with the writing partner's journal. The students selected their writing partner and the interaction between students included talk concerning the topic of the personal narrative as well as other topics. The students were evaluated on the basis of having completed a personal narrative and having engaged in a written dialogue with a partner.[2]

Results

Event Types. The event-types were identified based on the temporal orientation of the narrative (the events in the narrative had already taken place or were anticipated events) and the manner in which the students' oral and written language interactions affected their peer relationships.[3] The following four event-types were identified: discussing past experiences, discussing anticipated experiences, negotiating peer friendships, and name-calling (see Table 1). The most common among all the focal students was discussing past experiences (58%). In this type the students

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[2]The students responded to each other's journal while both partners were present. There were several reasons for using the dialogue journals in a face—to—face context. One was so that the students could read what they had written to each other (The first—and second—grade students wrote with invented spellings which made their writing sometimes difficult for others to read). The bilingual students often read their journals to monolingual English speaking students and they translated their writing when necessary. The face-to-face context of the event made the translation possible and enabled students of differing linguistic abilities to participate together in the literacy event.

[3]Stretches of talk between students during the literacy event were classified either as side sequences (a term from the field of conversational analysis, see Jefferson, 1972) or conversational narratives. A side sequence was a conversation which put the written dialogue on hold while the students discussed a topic. The side sequence was terminated when the students returned to the written dialogue. Conversational narratives were brief reports of past personal experiences told either as part of ongoing conversation during the writing of the personal narrative or dialogue or used to initiate a new conversational topic.

discussed the topics of the narrative during the written dialogues. Discussing anticipated experiences (27%) was similar to discussing past experiences except that the narrative topic was about an experience which was to take place in the immediate future such as a planned trip to Mexico or the park. Negotiating peer friendships (12%) involved the students making plans to play together after-school and name-calling (3%) involved calling names in the written dialogue. The event-type which one might have anticipated given the teacher's directions, to write about a past event and discuss it with a writing partner, was discussing past experiences. The other event-types could not have been anticipated based on the teacher's directions and illustrate the unique ways which children can interpret writing assignments.

Table 1
Event-Types for the Four Focal Students

Types	N	%
PE Discussing past experiences	49	58%
AE Discussing anticipated experiences	23	27%
NP Negotiating Peer friendships	10	12%
NC Name Calling	3	3%

Peer relationships between students were mediated by their interactions during the literacy event in different ways depending on the event-type. In negotiating peer friendships event-types, the students of the same gender were involved in working out friendship roles. The interaction during the literacy event directly affected the students since they used the event to plan play activities in which they would be participating (the after-school session discussed below is an example of this event-type). In discussing past or anticipated experiences, the students involved were not necessarily direct participants in the family or play topics mentioned

in the narratives or discussed in the written dialogue. They participated in the literacy event by wondering and questioning their partner about the narrative topics that had either already taken place or were to take place. In sessions in which name-calling occurred the students were placed in conflict roles as they traded insults in the written dialogue. One of the three sessions involving name-calling was signaled as being playful through the students' laughter. The two other sessions were not signaled as playful and the two students involved, Robert and Yolanda were cousins. Their interactions during the dialogue journal event were characterized by rivalry that eventually led to the name-calling (name-calling is illustrated in the baseball session which is discussed below).

Two examples will be used to illustrate the features of three of the event-types. The only event type not illustrated is discussing anticipated experiences which is similar to discussing past experiences. Two of the focal students, Robert and Yolanda participated in these sessions. Robert was the older of two boys in his family. He was fluent in both English and Spanish. His father was Anglo and bilingual; his mother was born and raised in Mexico. Yolanda, the only child in her family, was Robert's cousin and was also fluent in both languages. Both of her parents were born and raised in Mexico. In the first example, called the baseball session, the role of conversational narratives and side sequences which were characteristic features of the oral interaction in the dialogue journal literacy event is highlighted. The second example, called the after-school session, illustrates the event-type negotiating peer friendships and shows how students used the literacy event to plan play activities. Yolanda participated in both of the examples discussed below. Her interpretations of the dialogue journal literacy event will be compared across the three different event types of discussing past experiences, name-calling, and negotiating peer friendships.

The Baseball Session

This session took place during May of the second-grade school year. During this time of year the children's municipal baseball season was in full swing and, in keeping with the season, both Robert and Yolanda's personal narratives were about baseball. The written dialogues in their journals initially discussed baseball and then shifted to other topics. Another student, Eddie, was seated at the same table and joined their discussions of baseball (Eddie is Mexican-origin, speaks English, and has some understanding of

Spanish). This particular session contained many instances of students' discussions in the form of side-sequences and conversational narratives and illustrates how students used oral and written language interaction in Spanish and English to address concerns from their peer culture. In this particular session those concerns were related to playing games, winning and losing, and the relative importance of playing sports. The students used oral and written language to present and defend their position regarding the importance of playing baseball. In the process they collectively defined the literacy event as a time to discuss past experiences related to playing baseball and to engage in name-calling.

Example 1 shows Robert's personal narrative and the written dialogue with Yolanda. The conversational narratives (CN) and side sequences (SS, see footnote #3) have been omitted in the example to make the written dialogue easier to read. They are discussed below.

Example 1. Robert's Personal Narrative Written in His Journal[4]

Friday we won the Phillies and we got free sodas for $6 and my dad buy us some nachos if we win the games we won the Phillies four times (SS#l) The Phillies won us one time

Written Dialogue (in Robert's journal, R: Robert, Y: Yolanda)

1 Y: Good, but I aint playing baseball (CN#1) any more
2 R: Why, go Yolanda
3 Y: (CN#2) Because my mom doesn't want me to play baseball (CN#3) OK niña (little girl)
4 R: Qué burra (What a dumb bell)
5 Y: Tonto torpe me saca de quisio (Dumb clumsy, You make me mad)
6 R: OK Mañuela (SS#2) (street urchin)
7 Y: Bye bye bye bye
8 R: No no no no

Robert's narrative was about his baseball team's recent victory; a topic which was also of great interest to Yolanda and Eddie. The

[4]Talk is in plain text, writing is underlined— the student read out loud what was being written so it could be picked up on the tape recorder, .. indicate lines in the transcript were skipped to shorten the example, ( ) audio recording not clear, translations are in parenthesis, and the students' writing has been changed to conventional spellings.

students' interest in baseball led to lively discussions between them during the writing of Robert's personal narrative as well during the written dialogue portion of the literacy event (those discussions are called here side sequences). Yolanda and Robert were members of the same team. Eddie, who was a member of the Phillies team, overheard Robert writing in his narrative that his team had beaten the Phillies four times. Eddie disagreed with him. He initiated a discussion with Robert about how many times they had beaten his team (SS#1, during Robert's personal narrative writing). This side sequence was entirely in English and it temporally put the writing on hold as the students stopped writing to engage in the discussion. As soon as the side sequence was terminated the students resumed writing.

Example 2. Side Sequence #1

(Robert was writing his narrative. Yolanda and Eddie were seated at the table where he was writing. Robert had just finished writing, "We won the Phillies four times." Eric overheard Robert and disagreed with him. R: Robert, E: Eddie, Y: Yolanda, T: Teacher.)

9 R: We won the Phillies four times
10 E: We played you guys four times only Robert
11 R: But we won four times
12 E: We won you guys once
(Robert continued writing his narrative)
13 R: The Phillies won us one time
14 Y: We won them three times huh
15 R: Four, they won us once
16 Y: We played them four times huh?
17 R: We won them all those times but
18 Y: And then we won
19 E: We played you five times then
20 R: Four, oh yeah five
21 Y: Five
22 E: We won you guys ( )
23 Y: Five times
24 R: So you guys won us five take away one equals four We won you guys four times and you guys just won us one
25 Y: Don't waste time
26 E: Cause you guys were an hour late

27 Y: Robert don't waste your time on baseball just on talking and talking share
28 T: ¿OK, ya terminaste? OK, léeselo (did you finish, read it to him)

All three students were members of the teams being discussed and were all interested in keeping track of how many games they had won or lost. Yolanda attempted to terminate the side sequence (line #25 and 27) but kept it going by initiating a conversation in Spanish with the teacher about a statement Robert's father, the team's coach, had made. Yolanda told the teacher that Robert's father had said that playing baseball was the most important thing.

Example 3. Side Sequence #1 (continued)

29 Y: (Teacher's name), también el papá de, el papá del Robert dice que, que el juego es más importante que todo (Robert's father says that the game is the most important thing)
30 T: Sí, ¿es lo que dice? (Yeah, is that what he says? - said in a "tell me about it" tone)
31 Y: Mentiras, el juego no es más importante que todo (That's lies, the game isn't the most important thing)
32 R: Pues sí es (Well it is)
33 Y: Mentiras (Lies)
34 R: Cause, Cause
35 Y: Diosito es más importante que todas las cosas y la escuela porque aprendes a escribir y todo (God is more important than everything and school because you learn to write and everything)
36 R: Pues allá en los juegos también (Well over there in the games too)
37 Y: Juegos no es tan bien (In the games its not as good)
38 R: En los juegos también aprendes como (In the games you also learn how)
39 Y: Jugar y hacer (to play and do)
40 R: Jugar (play)
41 Y: Ya sé, pero en que es más mejor aprender de Dios o de escuela o de beisbol (I know but what is more important, to learn about God or school or baseball?)
42 R: To win
43 Y: To win?
44 R: To win all the games

45 E: You know what's more important than the Wildcats
46 R: I know they're ( )
47 E: Cause they're undefeated
48 R: They're cheating
49 E: No they aren't
50 Y: These people are winning us and they're cheating
51 R: And we won the Yankees once so they won us once Toros won us two times.

This argument will be examined in detail since it contributed to the name-calling which took place later during this session. During this second part of the side sequence (lines #29-51), Yolanda initiated an argument during which she and Robert made claims, challenged those claims, and presented supporting arguments (see Genishi & Di Paolo, 1982). Yolanda challenged a view she attributed to Robert's father which she summarized in line #29. In challenging that view, she stated that God and school were more important (see line #35). Robert supported his father's position (see line # 32, 36, 38). Both of them presented supporting arguments, although Robert had a difficult time getting the conversational floor as he was often cut-off by Yolanda (see line # 34-39).

Yolanda initiated the argument in Spanish and lines # 29-41 were in Spanish. At line # 42, Robert shifts to English and the argument changes to a conversation in English between Robert and Eddie which Yolanda also joins (see line #50). The shift to English by Robert in line # 42 came at a critical juncture in the argument. Yolanda had asked Robert which was better; learning about God, school, or baseball. Robert diffused her point by giving her an entirely different answer, "to win." Yolanda's use of Spanish reflected a "parental voice" of adult values as illustrated in the diminutive form of God in her phrase "Diosito es más importante que todo y la escuela" (God is more important than everything and school). Yolanda's phrase echoes an adult's talk to a child. She had also earlier assumed a regulatory role during this side-sequence by telling Robert to "don't waste time" (see line #25, 27). Robert's shift to English is a move in the argument which diffuses the parental voice that Yolanda's Spanish represents while reasserting a different set of parental values represented in Yolanda's characterization of Robert's father's view that, "el juego es más importante que todo" (the game is the most important thing). It is interesting to note the different ways that Robert and Yolanda

supported their position. Robert supported his position by contrasting the learning of school with learning that is valued by some peer groups, such as being skillful at playing a game. Yolanda drew her support from values based on the merits of schooling and faith. In this argument, Yolanda and Robert employ sociolinguistic strategies of argumentation as they position themselves within specific configurations of peer-culture interpretations of a range of parental values. This argument is an example of how routines from peer-culture were used in the oral interaction to define the dialogue literacy event and contributed to the name-calling which followed. Young children's arguments play key roles in their collective production and participation in peer-culture and in their appropriation of key features of the larger adult culture (Corsaro & Rizzo, 1988; Genishi & Di Paolo, 1982). In this case, the key features from the larger adult culture were contrasting parental values.

After Yolanda had written her reason for deciding not to play baseball and told a conversational narrative about why she wasn't going to play baseball anymore (line #1), Robert initiated a conversation with the teacher in which he said that Yolanda couldn't learn anything. Robert was referring to her baseball playing skills because Yolanda then commented that she could learn how to play other games.

Example 4. Conversational Narrative #3

52 R: (Teacher's name), la Yolanda no aprende nada (Yolanda doesn't learn anything)
53 Y: I don't care, OK, I could learn other games, its better than dumb baseball, you can just hurt yourself
54 E: I play soccer
55 Y: El Robert tam— Ya van dos veces que me lastimo cuando estoy así con mi bat el pitcher me dió aquí porque no podía ver la pelota y me pegó aquí, y luego me cayó. (I've hurt myself twice, when I'm like this with my bat, and the pitcher hit me here because I couldn't see the ball and he hit me here, and then the ball fell on me)
56 T: ¿Te pegó en el brazo? (It hit you on the arm?)
57 Y: mejor no, ya se enfadó mi mama que me dé golpe y golpe (Its better not to, my mother got tired of me getting banged up)
58 R: A mi el pitcher (To me the pitcher)

59 Y: pon el guante aquí en el ojo (Put the glove here on your eye) en la cara (on the face)pero tambíen porque los míos tienen así little things like pero todavía puede darme porque nimodo que me la ponga aquí (But also mine has little things—talking about her glove—but the ball can still hit me because I can't put it here)
60 D: Está así una raya y dos así (The glove— its like this, one line like this and two like this— talking about the glove's webbing)
61 Y: Como una ventana aquí mira dame el guante (Like a window, give me the glove.)I'll do it
62 D: Así está (Its like this— the students were talking and drawing a picture of the webbing on a baseball glove)
63 Y: Big liar big liar Robert it's like this
64 Y: Well let me finish writing

The first two lines of this section are the beginnings of an argument. Robert's comment in line #52 is critical of Yolanda's baseball playing abilities. She challenges his assertion by stating that she doesn't care about baseball, dislikes getting hurt, and that she prefers to play other games. Yolanda then tells a conversational narrative about getting hit by a baseball (line #55). In this narrative Yolanda gives a reason why she isn't going to play baseball and followed her response to the written dialogue, "Because my mom doesn't want me to play baseball anymore (see line #3). Robert also attempted to tell a conversational narrative but was unsuccessful. All he was able to say was, "a mi el pitcher" (to me the pitcher) before he was cut off by Yolanda (line #58-59).

After this conversational narrative Yolanda attempted to resume the written dialogue, "Well let me finish writing" (line #64). She finished her written response by adding the phrase, directed to Robert, "OK niña" (all right little girl, see line #3) to "Because my mom doesn't want me to play baseball." She might have added the insult in response to Robert saying that she didn't learn anything. Yolanda's shift to writing in Spanish indicated a shift in topic as the written dialogue shifted to name-calling and insults. Robert responded in Spanish and wrote "qué burra" (what a dope). The two students exchanged written insults in Spanish (line# 4-6) and then ended the written dialogue. There were no more conversational narratives or side sequences while the students traded insults. The only side sequence during the name-calling portion of the dialogue

phase was initiated by the teacher concerning the meaning of the term "Mañuela" (see line #7). This instance of name-calling, like the two others that were identified, took place through writing and illustrates a routine from the peer-culture that was used in the written interaction during this literacy event.

Summary of the Baseball Session

The baseball session illustrated how the literacy event was interpreted through interaction with both oral and written discourse in Spanish and English. Robert's personal narrative about baseball was like most of the other narratives he wrote. They presented the child's world of play which became the topic of the following written dialogue. The conversational narratives and side sequences that characterized the baseball session provided a way for the three students to participate together in the development of the interaction and consequently influenced how the students defined the event and the social purposes it served. Robert and Yolanda made strategic use of shifting between the two languages in both the oral and written dialogue. Robert shifted to English during the oral argument to dodge Yolanda's question and Yolanda shifted to Spanish in the written dialogue to initiate name-calling.

The first topic in the written dialogue of the baseball session was playing in organized baseball teams and then shifted to name-calling as a result of the students' interactions. In this case the shift in topic indicted a shift in the event-type from discussing past experiences to name-calling and also indicated a shift in the student's social purpose. Side-sequences also contributed to the other instance of name-calling involving Robert and Yolanda which took place in March of the second grade school year. The conversational narratives and side sequences in the baseball session took place during a portion of the personal narrative and the first part of the written dialogue. When the event-type shifted to name-calling, the interaction took.place through the exchange of written insults and not through side sequences and conversational narratives. The social organization of the event was realigned through the name-calling from team—mates discussing the wins and losses of their baseball team, to cousins engaged in verbal fighting and consequently the event-type shifted from discussing past experiences to name-calling. Baseball was the topic in the first part of the written dialogue and was the focus of the students' talk and conversational narratives. The calling of names might not have been

as easily discussed through conversational narratives even though one might expect that insults could also have been traded in the oral interaction.

The After-School Session

This session is an example of negotiating peer friendships. In this event-type the students addressed an important feature of peer-culture, the negotiation of peer friendships, by using the dialogue journal literacy event as a time to plan play activities. Negotiating peer friendships was the second most common event-type found in Yolanda's sessions. The play session in which Yolanda and her partner, Suzy, interacted took place during the spring of the second-grade year. Suzy is of Mexican-origin (She speaks English and understands some Spanish). Yolanda and Suzy were friends who often played together at recess and at each other's home after-school. Yolanda's other sessions which involved the negotiation of peer friendships took place from the spring of the first-grade school year to the end of the second-grade year. In all those sessions the writing partners were girls.

In the after-school session, the topic of both students' personal narratives was making arrangements to play dolls after-school. The anticipated play with dolls that they wrote about was a familiar part of their everyday lives mentioned in their narratives and it was an activity that they anticipated doing once school was over and they were back in their homes.

Example 5. Yolanda's Personal Narrative

Today Suzy is going to my house and Suzy is going to ask her mom and I am too and if my mom says no and Suzy's mom says no too then probably another day she will be able to come and if she comes we are going to play with our Barbies we are going to play Barbies and then get my car of my Barbies and if Suzy wants Day and Night Barbies then if I want Day and Night Barbies too then I will let her fin (the end)

Suzy's Personal Narrative

Today I might go to Yolanda's house to play Barbies and then my mom is going to come for me and she might take Yolanda home with us so she can play with me.

The students and their parents were characters in each other's stories. Alongside the anticipation of playing with her friends, there was also an uncertainty in both students' narratives that came from their need to get their parents' permission in order to be able to carry out their plans. This uncertainty complicated their plans since the students were not sure that they would be able play together. Yolanda addressed this uncertainty in her narratives by using "if, then" statements. Suzy's narrative also presented uncertainty through the use of the word "might." The anticipation, planning, and uncertainty of the playing dolls after-school that was introduced in the personal narrative became the topic of the written dialogue.

Example 6. Written Dialogue (in Yolanda's journal)

1 S: But I don't know if I could go to your house today
2 Y: I know Suzy but if you could come then we'll play Barbies.
3 S: What Barbies do (CN#1) you have? (SS#l)
4 Y: Day and Night Barbie and Peaches and Cream Loving You Barbie Western Barbies (CN#2) Exercise Barbie My First Barbie and that's it and Crystal Barbie Fin (The End)

The uncertainty contained in the narratives was also present in Suzy's first response in the written dialogue (line #1) and in Yolanda's "if, then" statement (line# 2). At this point Suzy switched the topic of the dialogue from discussing the after-school play activity to Yolanda's Barbies. While Suzy wrote her question, Yolanda told the teacher conversational narrative about her pigeon laying eggs (CN#1, line #3). After her story about the pigeon Suzy read her written response. Yolanda then initiated a side sequence about something she noticed on an ant farm that was sitting on a counter top close to the table where they were writing (SS#1, line #3). Yolanda listed the Barbies she owned and signaled the end of the written dialogue by writing fin (the end, line #4). Suzy then read her personal narrative and the students discussed the topic of making plans to play in the written dialogue that was written in Suzy's journal.

Example 7. Written Dialogue (in Suzy's journal)

5 Y: And if my (CN#3) mom says no well I will go another day (SS#2)

6 S: And if my mom says no that you can't come to my house then I will have to play by myself
7 Y: I will stay crying and I will hit my mom (CN#5)
8 S: You will hit your mom just because you cant go to my house?
9 Y: Porque yo soy corajuda (SS#3) (Because I'm hot tempered)
l0 S: Why are you mean with your mom?
11 Y: I don't know (SS#4) fin (the end)

In this written dialogue the students wrote about what they would do if their parents did not give them permission to play at each other's homes (lines #5-6). The topic of the written dialogue then shifted slightly as Yolanda wrote about crying and hitting her mom (line #7). At that point she told a conversational narrative about a little girl who was disrespectful to her mother.

Example 8. Conversational Narrative #5
Le pego unas nalgadas, (teacher's name), a mi mami
una nalgada y se mueve así
porque le duele y luego una muchachita de allá de Cucurpe (teacher's name)
de aIlá de Cucurpe se llama Carmen se portó mal
porque su mamá tenía tres hijas
esa señora
y luego esa señora se iba ir y no quiso llevar las niñas que tenía las quiso dejar con mi niña en Cucurpe
y se enojó La niña y luego ¿sabes qué?
¿lo que dijo cuando se iba su mamá?
ójala que se maten en medio camino dijo la muchachita llorando
y luego la mamá de ella le pegó una cachetada aquí
y luego le salió sangre por las narices

(I spank my mother, a swat and she moves like this, because it hurts her and then a little girl from Cucurpe, from over there from Cucurpe her name is Carmen she misbehaved, because her mother had three daughters, that lady, and then that lady wanted to leave and she didn't want to take her daughters, she wanted to leave them with my godmother in Cucurpe, and the little girl got mad and you know what, what she said when her mother was leaving?, I hope you kill yourselves on the road said the little girl crying, and then

her mother slapped her right here, and then blood came out of her nose)

This conversational narrative was told after Yolanda's written response which shifted the topic of the dialogue from their plans to what Yolanda would do if she didn't get her parents' permission. After Suzy wondered about Yolanda's statement that Yolanda hit her mom, Yolanda switched to writing in Spanish. She called herself "corajuda" (hot-tempered) and then demonstrated to the teacher how such a person could be identified (SS #3, line 5).

Example 9. Side Sequence #3

Y: Mira, (Teacher's name) si me corto un pelo verás y si se me hace curly es que soy corajuda (look if I a cut a hair you'll see, and if it gets curly I'm hot-tempered)
T: ¿Quién te dijo eso Yolanda? (Who told you that?)
Y: Mi niña, cuando alguien se porta mal alguien le jala un cabello y es corajuda (My godmother, when someone gets mad, someone yanks a hair out and they're hot-tempered)
T: Si se le hace chinito es corajuda (If it gets curly their hot-tempered)
Y: Muy corajuda soy (I'm very hot-tempered)
S: I don't know what you said Yolanda
Y: Because I am mean with my mom. Porque yo soy corajuda

The written dialogue originally began with the students contemplating what they would do if their plans did not come to pass. The written dialogue then shifted to Yolanda's interactions with her mother and the side-sequences and conversational narratives told during in this section of the written dialogue were used by Yolanda to develop her self-characterization as "corajuda."

Summary of the After-School Session

The after-school session illustrated the negotiation of friendship. Establishing and negotiating friendships has been identified in studies of peer culture as a main concern of children (Corsaro, 1985, 1988). All the four focal students participated in at least one session which was interpreted as a time to negotiate peer friendships. As in the after-school session, the students presented the world of play in their personal narratives and the written

dialogues were used to discuss their reactions to their plans and to interactively construct the world of anticipated peer play activities. In the after-school session, Yolanda and Suzy affirmed their friendship and pursued in their written dialogues the childhood interest of playing with dolls. Unlike the baseball session, the event-type in this example, negotiating peer-friendship did not shift. In the after-school session both personal narratives and the written dialogue were concerned with the topic of making plans to play dolls after-school. In addition to making plans they also expressed the uncertainty of young children's plans since they needed their parents' approval. The side-sequences and conversational narratives in this session were not as interactive as the ones in the baseball session. Suzy did not take as active a role as Robert and Eddie in the talk that was part of the literacy event. In the baseball session the students used routines from peer culture in both the oral and written interaction. In the after-school session the entire event was concerned with the routine of making plans and arrangements to play at each others' house.

In the after-school session both students were female and the students wrote and talked about a play event common to girls. In this session Yolanda actively participated in the oral interaction. In the baseball session Yolanda was a member of a coed team, the only female student in the three-way interaction, and she took an active role in the oral interaction. She challenged the importance of games, and Robert criticized her ability to learn to play baseball. In the argument, the students did not directly address gender roles, although Yolanda did call Robert a "nina" (little girl) to initiate the exchange of written insults. The evidence they used to support their position came from their presentation of contrasting parental values. Yolanda's participation in both sessions highlights how peer-culture is not a uniform set of values and concerns but, like other cultures, exhibits variation across its members. In these two examples, Robert and Yolanda illustrate variability within peer culture in relation to gender and the interpretation of parental values. Yolanda's peer-culture includes both membership on a co-ed baseball team and playing dolls with same-gender friends.

Another Aspect of Student's Interpretations

The students' interpretations of the event were discussed in relation to four general event-types which were related to the students' social purposes and how they used oral and written

language interaction in their interpretation of the event. The four event-types were general categories used in this initial study of bilingual children's interpretations and consequently did not identify all the subtle ways that the students could have interpreted the event. For example there were several instances of ritualized speech play and children's folklore in another one of the focal students' sessions which included the use of familiar taunting routines from peer culture in the written dialogue. Kata, one of the four focal students had an older brother and a younger sister. She was a Spanish dominant bilingual. Both of her parents were born in Mexico. An example of a taunting routine used by Kata in the written dialogue was "pelón pelonete, cabeza de cahuete, vendiendo tamales a cinco por siete" (bald baldhead, firecracker head, selling tamales for five for seven). The following example of ritualized speech play in children's conversation is taken from Garvey (1977, p. 116).

Example 10. Ritualized Speech Play
First Child: I'm going to work.
Second Child: You're already at work.
First Child: No, I'm not. I'm going to school.
Second Child: You're already at school.
First Child: No, I'm not. I'm going to the party.
Second Child: You're already at the party.
First Child: No, I'm not

The following example of Kata's ritualized speech play involved controlled repetition of the question and answer exchanges in the written dialogue.

Example 11. Kata's Ritualized Speech Play
(Kata's narrative was about her and her younger sister wearing a pair of glasses and her mother laughing at her sister's appearance. K: Kata, J: Josie)

J: Did it look funny on you?
K: I don't know because I don't have four eyes to see my glasses
J: Why don't you have four eyes?
K: Because all the persons have two eyes
J: Do you like to have four eyes?
K: No because only the animals have four eyes

J: Would you like to have two eyes better?
K: Of course my glasses

Although speech play was not an aspect of the four event-types, it still reflected influence from peer culture on students' interpretation of the literacy event. The examples of speech play which were scattered across Kata's sessions indicate that besides discussing a past experience with glasses, as in the example above, the literacy event was also interpreted as a time in which to engage in speech play. The students used a common type of young children's speech play and transferred that routine to the written channel as they engaged in ritualized play during the written dialogue.

Discussion

Even though this study was concerned with how students interpreted a dialogue journal literacy event, the factors which influenced the students' interpretations were similar to findings from other studies of students' interpretation of other literacy events. Those factors were: (a) the interests and concerns of students' peer culture (Bloome, 1983; Dyson, 1985), (b) interaction between peers (Dyson, 1989), and (c) the role of experience with a literacy event over time (Hudson, 1988).

The present study focused on the role that children's interests and social purposes played in their interpretations and definitions of the dialogue journal literacy event and is similar to Dyson's (1989) study in that peer interaction played an important role in defining the nature of the literacy event. Based on her research on young children's literacy and peer relationships, Dyson (1989) noted that writing did not evolve only from writing but from children's interactions and constructions of symbolic and social worlds. Nystrand (1989) made similar claims suggesting that features of writing are best understood in relation to writers' and readers' interests and purposes and that the forms of texts are not only 'related to the function they serve but also the role they play in mediating social relationships. In Dyson's (1989) study, children were able to bring together the world of their written text with their peer friendships by including friends as characters in their stories. In the present study the students also included their friends as characters in their stories but, unlike the students in Dyson's study, the students were required to engage in peer interaction during the written dialogue portion of the literacy event as part of the instructional

requirements. Consequently, the students in the present study had means available to them for peer interaction that were not available to the students in Dyson's study.

The peer group in Dyson's research were both audience and critics of each other's stories and their interaction influenced the development of their stories. In the present study the writing partner was the audience for the story, and the influence from the students' interactions on the literacy event was most apparent in the various ways the literacy event was interpreted. Two of the four event-types might not have occurred if the students were sharing their journals with the teacher and not with their peers. Those two types were: negotiating peer friendships and name-calling. The students were able to define the literacy event and make sense of it in a wider range of event-types due to the fact that they were sharing their dialogue journals with peers instead of, as is usually the case, with the teacher.

The students' interactions helped define the literacy event in a way that made sense of the contrived nature of the written dialogues. For reasons previously stated, the dialogue journals were used in a face-to-face context instead of across space and time. The primary reasons were to allow the young children to read their invented spellings to each other and so that the bilingual children could translate their writing when necessary. The written dialogue phases of the literacy event were interpreted and made sense of through the interests and concerns of peer culture such as negotiating friendship and the childhood world of play. Hudson (1988) stated that students can take ownership of assigned writing tasks if they create the text and have experiences with the assignment over time. Hudson concluded that when students continue to act upon their own representations of an assignment they tend to claim ownership of official writing. This appears to have happened with the dialogue journal event as the students worked on their representation of the event through the different event-types over an extended period of time. The students' interpretations recast the unfamiliar experience of engaging in a written dialogue in a face-to-face context into their more familiar experiences with peer culture. Corsaro (1986) used the term "familiarization" in order to talk about how the routines of peer culture serve to transform the ambiguities of the adult world into the familiar and shared routines of peer culture. The students used their involvement in peer culture in order to interpret the literacy event according to their previous knowledge and

experiences as children. The dialogue journal literacy event was interpreted as a time to use oral and written language to pursue the interests and concerns of childhood.

The influence of peer-culture on the young bilingual children's interpretations of the dialogue journal literacy event raises implications for educators including the reminder that young children may interpret literacy events in unexpected ways. An example was the event-type, negotiating peer friendships which Yolanda's after-school session illustrated. These unexpected interpretations many times can be understood when educators take into consideration the important role that children's peer-culture plays in their lives. Children's knowledge of and involvement in peer culture is a cultural resource that they draw upon to interpret literacy events. Educators, like other adults, many times see young children's interpretive strategies as merely "play." However, children's peer culture is a sense-making resource which they employ in their interpretations of social interaction as Gilmore (1986) observes, "children's play forms and peer social interactions often provide an unusually rich mode of expression for displays of language and literacy competence as well as for displays of culture and social relationships" (p. 155).

Educators should also be mindful that, as was the case with the dialogue journals, children can interpret some classroom literacy events in a manner which allows them to pursue the concerns of peer culture while fulfilling the instructional requirements of the event. There were two general instructional requirements for this event; to write a personal experience narrative and engage in a written dialogue with a partner. Writing personal narratives of their own experiences introduced topics from the bilingual children's out-of-school lives into the literacy event. These topics then became the basis for the written dialogues. Many literacy events may not lend themselves as readily to various interpretations as the dialogue journals in this study or to the introduction of out-of-school experiences. In fact, school literacy events have been characterized as being resistant to students' interpretations based on routines or knowledge from outside the school culture (Scollon & Scollon, 1982; Gilmore, 1986). The talk and social interaction between students, which was a key characteristic of the literacy event examined in this study, played important roles in the children's interpretations. There exists a current need to examine how characteristics of literacy events and the social interaction between

minority students engaged in them make them more or less flexible to students' interpretations.

Relationships between minority children's culture and their academic performance have been noted in previous research which has been used to establish the need for culturally appropriate curriculum, lessons, and interactions between teacher and students (Au, 1980; Michaels 1986; Moll 1988). Previous research has also indicated that making community knowledge relevant topics for writing and allowing students to collectively make sense of instructional activities are two ways to engage minority children in instructional activities (Hudelson 1989; Moll 1987, 1988). In addition to these insights from previous research, this study highlights the need to also take into consideration minority children's participation in peer-culture as a specific sub-culture that can impact how they interpret literacy events. Close observations of students' interactions during literacy events can provide information concerning their peer-culture. Examples of such information were discussed in the analysis of the baseball and after-school sessions. Along with considering peer-culture as a specific sub-culture that impacts children's interpretations, it is also necessary to keep in mind that like other cultures, peer-culture is not uniform but differentiated. The baseball and after-school sessions provided examples of how Robert and Yolanda operated from different peer-culture values and gender roles. Questions for future research stemming from the observation that peer-culture is differentiated are related to discussions of children's talk and gender. Swann (1992) cites the need for more research on the relationships between gender, ethnicity, the organization of instructional events, and classroom talk. This study helps raise the additional factors of gender and children's participation in peer-culture.

This study directs bilingual educators' attention to links between Mexican-origin children's values, interests, and concerns from their peer-culture and their uses of English and Spanish in both oral and written form during a literacy event. By focusing on what students do with oral and written language in both Spanish and English during a literacy event, educators can look for relationships between peer culture and children's social purposes. The students' strategic uses of their bilingualism and biliteracy in the dialogue journal literacy event shows that cultural and linguistic resources are manipulated by children to achieve their social purposes as illustrated by the code-switching in both speaking and writing that

took place in the baseball session. The students' code-switching was not randomly associated with their interpretations of the literacy event but rather was constitutive of them and served to define their social purposes. Another example was the use of taunting routines in Spanish by Kata to define the event as a time to engage in speech play. Examinations of bilingual children's interactions during a literacy event can identify the cultural and linguistic resources they draw upon in their interpretations and interactions during the event. Such examinations are invaluable to educators since they provide information on young children's perspectives of literacy events which have been shown to often differ from adults' perspectives and because they illuminate relationships between bilingualism, biliteracy, and peer culture.

A limitation of the present study was that student interview data was not available to provide additional information on their interpretations of the event. Future studies of young, minority children's interpretation of literacy events should attempt to incorporate interview data although the problematic nature of interviews which ask young children to verbally express the rationale for their decisions is recognized. Additionally, future studies interested in examining social factors which influence children's interpretations can continue to identify terms and their associated concepts which specifically highlight the social purposes which play a part in children's understanding of literacy events. One such concept employed in this study was "familiarization" which explained how children's peer culture was used in their interpretation of the literacy event.

Conclusion

The students' interpretations of the dialogue journal literacy event were discussed in terms of event-types which described the students' social purposes and how their interactions with oral and written language in Spanish and English during the literacy event mediated peer relationships. The students' interpretations were influenced by many factors including the teacher's directions and requirements for the event and concerns from the students' peer culture. The students' interpretations were constrained by the teachers requirements which included the type of narrative the students needed to write. The students operated within those constraints as they collaboratively constructed their interpretations

and used the event to pursue the interests and concerns of their peer culture.

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